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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000759

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: NON-PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION NIXES  
DIALOGUE - PREPARES SECOND ROUND OF PROTESTS

REF: A. TBILISI 0748

¶B. TBILISI 0747

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Protests were largely halted over the April 17-20 orthodox Easter holiday weekend with only a symbolic number of protesters in the streets. Despite government and EU representative Peter Semneby's efforts to try to engage the non-parliamentary opposition in talks, on Saturday, April 18 the non-parliamentary opposition issued a statement rejecting dialogue and calling once again for President Saakashvili's resignation. The non-parliamentary opposition is planning to resume protests again on Tuesday, April 21 promising massive crowds and a daily increase in momentum which will topple Saakashvili. Thus far, there is little evidence of such a massive turnout. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: After a four-day respite, and paltry crowds before the holiday, the non-parliamentary opposition is banking on Tuesday's protests to provide momentum to force Saakashvili from office. Although they may get a few more people in the street than immediately before the Holy Week holidays, it is hard to imagine anywhere near a critical mass will turn out for the 13th day of protesting. The GoG has been and is still willing to offer the non-parliamentary opposition a face saving way out of their predicament. However, the non-parliamentary opposition seems determined to take a maximalist, uncompromising line despite increasing evidence that the public is tiring of the protests and is only marginally supportive of the opposition position. Non-parliamentary opposition contacts are telling us that maintaining unity among the group is the highest priority and appears to have become an end in itself. The protests are becoming more detached from any semblance of a constructive way to push for tangible democratic changes. The non-parliamentary opposition promises to announce another new action plan April 21, but seems paralyzed to do anything other than continue protests and call for Saakashvili's resignation. End Comment.

Protests Halt - New Protests Scheduled

¶3. (C) A token presence of protesters remained in front of Parliament, the Public Broadcasters Building, and the Presidential Residence although no speakers addressed the crowd during the four-day Orthodox Easter holiday, April 17-20. A number of parties hosted a feast outside the Presidential Residence on Easter Sunday. (Embassy Note: A number of our Georgian staff members told us how inappropriate the display was and that among their friends it provoked an almost universally negative reaction. End Note.)

Although some in the non-parliamentary opposition are privately willing to listen to calls for dialogue, their public position has only become more resolute with Saturday's statement being read by relative moderate David Usupashvili (Alliance for Georgia - Republicans). Usupashvili announced that the non-parliamentary opposition would only negotiate

President Saakashvili's resignation and went on to call for the "dismissal of oppressors, election riggers, and censors". Usupashvili asked for the international community to take meaningful steps in this regard. In a private conversation, Alasania ally and former Georgian Ambassador to Turkmenistan Alex Petriashvili suggested to PolChief that the USG request Saakashvili to engage in negotiations over his resignation. Apparently this is the way the protest leaders envision a role for the international community. While many in the non-parliamentary opposition spoke of massive new crowds of protesters for Tuesday's rally, Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) explained that the non-parliamentary opposition plan of involving protesters from the regions was only "symbolic" and not intended to increase the number of protesters. The non-parliamentary opposition is set to announce another new action plan April 21.

#### Negotiation without Concessions - Opposition Avoids Saakashvili Meeting

¶4. (C) Speaker of Parliament David Bakradze has been in contact with Alasania and other non-parliamentary opposition leaders, but told the Ambassador that Saturday's statement was a setback. Bakradze reiterated that the GoG was not going to agree to anything unilaterally as the non-parliamentary opposition would just pocket the concession and continue to insist on Saakashvili's resignation. In this vein, Alasania repeated the non-parliamentary line saying he would negotiate with Saakashvili on democratic reform, but the non-parliamentary opposition would "not at all" give up on its demand that Saakashvili resign. Bakradze indicated that many in the non-parliamentary opposition were not

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interested in good faith dialogue and vastly overestimated their bargaining position. Bakradze specifically mentioned Alasania, reiterating the government's view that Alasania uses a moderate tone in private to Western diplomats but says radical things in public and refuses to negotiate in good faith. According to Bakradze, Deputy Foreign Minister (and Saakashvili insider) Giga Bokeria has also spoken with Irakli Alasania as well as Levan Gachechiladze to discuss a face saving way out of the non-parliamentary opposition's self-inflicted predicament.

¶5. (C) Bakradze told the Ambassador that the GoG had hoped to arrange a pull-aside meeting with Saakashvili and a number of non-parliamentary opposition leaders at midnight Easter mass, but the non-parliamentary leaders elected not to attend. Bakradze told the Ambassador that UNM focus groups showed that the public is very unhappy with the protests. Bakradze also mentioned the same focus groups are also unhappy with the GoG but their anger is primarily directed at the non-parliamentary leaders for the impasse. Bakradze expressed his regret that the non-parliamentary opposition rejected another opportunity for dialogue, but said that the GoG would still work on finding a "face saving" way out of the impasse. Bakradze did not expect a large turnout for the April 21 protest rally and expected the rallies to continue for a few more days before they die out.

#### Public Scared and Confused

¶6. (C) An increasing number of beatings have been reported to the Public Defender's office (ref A). Details remain unclear although public anxiety is increasing as stories of robberies and crimes spread. Over the weekend, Post became aware of two recent burglaries, one of an American citizen and long-time Tbilisi resident, another of the former Georgian Ambassador to the United States and Switzerland and Alasania supporter, Levan Mikkeladze. Both appear to be crimes of opportunity; Alasania's camp has not alleged political motivations in the Mikkeladze case pending a police investigation. Whether these are crimes of opportunity, political violence, or otherwise, anecdotal evidence suggests

crime has increased since the protests began although the public seems unsure whom to blame. Adding to the public confusion, the MOIA released a video in which a Burjanadze supporter claimed that he was approached by some non-parliamentary opposition representatives to convince him to use a "trivial quarrel" over a car incident and claim it was the result of MOIA repression. Burjanadze confirmed the person was a supporter, but denied his allegations. Finally, seeming to confirm the rumors, over the weekend, a number of news programs showed numerous clips of protesters being paid for their efforts. (Embassy Comment: This is the first instance of video footage of protesters being paid released to the public. End Comment.)

TEFFT